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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3227  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 9696  
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 5441  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 001805

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PK](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: PML FORWARD BLOCK IN THE WINGS

REF: (A) ISLAMABAD 1773 (B) ISLAMABAD 854

Classified By: CDA E. Candace Putnam, for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: As the deadlock over restoration of the judiciary drags on, back room negotiations continue over what might happen should the coalition collapse. Pakistan Muslim League (PML) parliamentarian Mian Manzoor Ahmad Wattoo claims that Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Asif Zardari has agreed to give PML parliamentarians rewards if they dump the Chaudhrys from the PML leadership. The PML would then become a "loyal opposition," ready to join the PPP in a coalition upon the departure from government of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz. End summary.

Off the Front Page, But Not Gone  
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¶2. (C) PolOff met May 7 with Pakistan Muslim League (PML) National Assembly member Mian Manzoor Ahmad Wattoo. The parliamentarian from Okara, a rural district in Eastern Punjab, at first claimed he was an "independent;" he then admitted that he was still officially in PML. But Wattoo expressed open disdain for both the Chaudhrys, leading the PML, and the Sharifs, leading Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). He added that the former barely wanted him in the PML, and the latter would never accept him in PML-N.

¶3. (C) Wattoo reveled in his maverick political history, recounting how he had previously led splinter PML factions. He served briefly as Punjab Chief Minister in the 1990s, in a coalition with Pakistan People's Party (PPP), because he was able to pit the country's two largest parties against one another, Wattoo claimed.

¶4. (C) Wattoo's penchant for political intrigue and machinations has not changed; he is now the unofficial leader of a "forward block" within the PML (Ref B). Along with Punjab Provincial Assembly member Hamid Nasir Chattha, Wattoo was named in local press just days after Pakistan's February 18 general elections, reportedly negotiating with PPP Co-Chairman Asif Zardari about the PML joining the new GOP. According to PPP sources at the time, as many as 30 of PML's 53 national level parliamentarians were ready to bolt from the Chaudhrys' PML. Both ideas failed.

With Open Arms  
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¶5. (C) But the intention to overthrow the Chaudhrys' leadership of the PML persists, according to Wattoo. He claimed to have met secretly with Zardari several times in

the last month. Zardari reportedly proposed that the PML serve as a "loyal opposition." In exchange, Zardari has agreed to name some of these opposition members as National Assembly committee chairs and even give them development funds equal to amounts controlled by ruling coalition parliamentarians.

¶6. (C) The quid pro quo, however, would be contingent on the PML dumping the Chaudhrys. He added that a mutiny had been tried before and failed. In his opinion, only President Pervez Musharraf had enough bureaucratic and financial reach to force the Chaudhrys out. (See Ref A on Musharraf's failure to fire the Chaudhrys.)

¶7. (C) Once a "loyal opposition" (without the Chaudhrys), Wattoo revealed, the PML would sit in waiting for the current GOP coalition to fall apart. Per Zardari's plan, Wattoo claimed, the new PML would then automatically join the PPP in government.

¶8. (C) Comment: Schemes along these lines have been rumored before (privately, and sometimes very publicly) and failed. What Wattoo's comments reveal is that the PML continues to weaken and Zardari continues to keep his options open in the event the coalition does not hold together in the long term.

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